

Metaphorical Conceptions and Grammatical Gains: A Mixed-Methods Study on Iranian EFL Learners' Understanding of Language Learning and Idioms

Javad Khodadoust¹, Hosein Siahpoosh², Mehran Davarbina³

1. PhD Candidate, Department of English Language, Ard.C., Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran

2. Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Ard.C., Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran,

h.siahpoosh@iau.ac.ir

3. Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Ard.C., Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran

Article Info

Article type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received 29 May. 2025

Received in revised form 18

Jun. 2026

Accepted 28 Sep. 2025

Published online 01 Sep. 2026

Keywords:

Conceptual Metaphor,
Idioms,
EFL Grammar Instruction,
Mixed-Methods Research

ABSTRACT

Objective: This research looks at the metaphorical conceptualization of language acquisition by Iranian EFL students and assesses the effect of instruction based on conceptual metaphors on their grammatical knowledge of idioms. The research is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which posits that abstract linguistic knowledge is structured through embodied, metaphorical thought.

Methods: The study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews ($n = 30$) and three focus group interviews with purposively selected intermediate EFL learners were conducted to identify key metaphorical patterns. In the quantitative phase, 384 students were randomly assigned to either an experimental group ($n = 192$), which received five weeks of metaphor-based multimodal idiom instruction, and a control group ($n = 192$), which received traditional instruction. Pre- and post-tests measured participants' grammatical knowledge of idioms, and data were analyzed using paired-samples and independent-samples t-tests.

Results: Qualitative results showed five main metaphorical ideas: learning is a trip; grammar is a puzzle or machine; writing is construction; instructor is guide; and learning is emotionally charged. With a mean gain of 4.85 and a p value of less than .000, the experimental group showed a noticeable improvement in idiomatic grammatical accuracy; the control group showed little gain (mean gain = 0.36, $p = .001$). Between-group analyses confirmed the greater effectiveness of metaphor-based instruction ($p < .000$).

Conclusions: By linking abstract language with embodied experience, conceptual metaphor-based instruction greatly improves pupils' idiomatic grammatical ability. The study emphasizes the need of including metaphorical pedagogy into English as a foreign language setting to promote more thorough knowledge, memory, and learner involvement.

Cite this article: Khodadoust, J., Siahpoosh, H. & Davarbina, M. (2026). Metaphorical conceptions and grammatical gains: a mixed-methods study on Iranian EFL learners' understanding of language learning and idioms. *Iranian Journal of Educational Research*, 5 (3), 1-31.

. DOI: <https://doi.org/>



© The Author(s).

DOI: <https://doi.org/>

Publisher: University of Hormozgan.

Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) is more than vocabulary and mastery of grammar—it is a profoundly conceptual, affective, and culturally mediated activity. Of the many cognitive tools learners use to build meaning for this activity, metaphor is especially important. As set up in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Kövecses, 2020; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008), language learning domains such as these are generally accounted for metaphorical extensions from bodily, concrete experience. When a student says, "learning English is like climbing a mountain," they are not merely engaging in poetic metaphor; they are evoking a cognitive model from sensorimotor and affective experience. According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Kövecses, 2020; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008), this type of metaphor encapsulates embodied cognition, wherein students map abstract experience—such as the acquisition of a second language—through metaphors grounded in bodily and affective realities. This aligns with the argument that metaphor is a fundamental mode of thought, not linguistic ornamentation (Gibbs, 2006; Littlemore & Low, 2006). In second language learning (SLA) situations as well, metaphors reveal students' affective profiles, identity positions, and cognitive stances toward learning tasks (Oxford et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2022) and are, therefore, invaluable tools for facilitating and guiding the learning process.

During the last decade, there has been an increased focus on the conceptual metaphors' role in SLA. Conceptual metaphors not only act as windows to learners' worlds of cognition and feelings but also as markers of their self-efficacy, motivation, anxiety, and learning strategies (Boers, 2018; Oxford et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2022). Additionally, teacher metaphors influence pedagogical identity and shape classroom interaction (Farjami, 2012; Shaw & Andrei, 2020). This dual purpose—directive and diagnostic—makes metaphor an effective tool for language learning and teaching. It has been shown in numerous studies that learners' metaphors not only reflect their linguistic development but also their motivation, anxiety, and self-concept as language users (Abdulaal et al., 2023; Oxford et al., 2014). One study by Boers and Lindstromberg (2008) shows that teaching which utilizes metaphor can optimize vocabulary recall and idiom comprehension by accessing learners' embodied knowledge. Similarly, studies by Littlemore and Low (2006) and Xu et al. (2022) indicate that metaphor use facilitates deeper cognitive processing of language activities and facilitates learner autonomy. In teacher education, metaphors have been used to uncover teachers' beliefs and pedagogic orientations, highlighting their role in classroom

interaction and instructional identity (Ahmad & Abd Samad, 2018; Shaw & Andrei, 2020). Thus, metaphor functions at various levels of SLA—as a thought tool, emotional indicator, and teaching device.

In the Iranian context, in which English is studied as a foreign language within examination-oriented, grammar-dedicated curricula, idiomatic and metaphorical features of language are likely to receive little attention. Iranian learners are typically exposed to literal, context-free textbook input, and teaching in classrooms rarely addresses figurative competence or embodied cognition (Amerian, 2023; Amin, 2018; Esfandiari et al., 2022). For this reason, Iranian students typically struggle to handle the transparent nature of English idioms and figurative language, which requires linguistic and conceptual flexibility. Moreover, cultural remoteness from English-speaking metaphoric schemata (e.g., 'life is a race', 'time is money') makes it harder for Iranian learners to decode and memorize these schemata. These challenges are particularly relevant to college students who are to communicate academically or professionally, whereby idiomatic competence contributes pragmatic fluency and rhetorical power.

One of the more interesting advances in recent work is the application of metaphor-based instruction to the acquisition of idioms—multi-word sequences whose meanings are often semantically opaque and culturally bound. While broader regions of figurative and grammatical language can benefit from conceptual metaphor approaches, this study aims at idiomatic expressions specifically as the primary instructional target due to their difficulty and salience in advanced-level EFL proficiency. By placing idioms within metaphorical frameworks—such as *ANGER IS HEAT* or *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*—teachers can make it possible for learners to see abstract sense through embodied cognition (Alibali & Nathan, 2018; Shapiro & Stolz, 2019). Different research works have shown the benefits of metaphorically guided instruction, such as enhanced learners' retention, clarity of meaning, and grammaticalization of idioms (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008; Littlemore & Low, 2006; Song & Reynolds, 2023). These impacts appear to be even stronger when learning incorporates multimodal aspects such as visual presentation, gesturing, spatial metaphors, and audio (Forceville, 2019; Piquer-Píriz, 2020; Adami, 2023), in line with embodied cognition notions (Alibali & Nathan, 2018). Researchers are divided as to whether metaphorical methods are universally effective. For example, cognitive overload or cross-cultural differences within the source and target domains of metaphors utilized within metaphor

teaching have been questioned by some (Littlemore, 2009; Kövecses, 2015). Such issues form the basis for the need for empirical investigation in line with given settings. Within EFL contexts like Iran—where proficiency in idioms is typically underdeveloped—there must be a study to investigate whether metaphor-related methodologies indeed improve learners' comprehension and utilization of idioms.

Nevertheless, in spite of these advancements, very few empirical studies have explored how Iranian EFL learners use metaphors in conceptualizing language learning or how metaphor-guided instruction affects their idiomatic grammar knowledge. Others have compared metaphors in teachers' talk or textbooks, such as Farjami (2012), who compared Iranian EFL learner and teacher metaphors for learning grammar, and Shaw and Andrei (2020), who compared pre-service teachers' metaphorical conceptions of English language teaching. Ahmad and Abd Samad (2018) also examined how metaphors of teaching convey identity in early childhood EFL teaching. However, few studies have empirically combined metaphor elicitation with instruction, especially in EFL contexts where students are strongly constrained in the acquisition of idioms and rhetorical structure (Afifi, 2021; Fallah et al., 2024; Saneie et al., 2020). As vast as conceptual metaphor teaching enjoys theoretical popularity and pedagogical potential, remarkably little context-specific research examines its pedagogical application in the Iranian EFL context. Some studies have been done on teachers' use of metaphors or textbook metadata.

Nevertheless, little empirical research has been done on how Iranian learners themselves conceptualize language learning as a metaphorical matter—or even how instruction supported by metaphor can influence their acquisition of idiomatic grammar. This is a significant gap because idiomatic competence is just as much of a requirement for fluency, pragmatic expression, and academic writing as it is for understanding. Bridging this gap might reveal new insight into learner cognition and afford teachers more culturally and cognitively consistent teaching methods. Hence, this research aims to bridge this gap by integrating metaphor elicitation and metaphor-based instruction in a single, classroom-oriented research design. This study completes that gap by not only exploring conceptual metaphors that learners use but also the effectiveness of instruction through metaphors in enhancing idiomatic grammatical knowledge. This study investigates two key aspects of language learning in the Iranian EFL context:

1. How do Iranian EFL learners metaphorically conceptualize foreign language learning?

2. Does the use of conceptual metaphors enhance Iranian EFL learners' grammatical understanding of idioms?

Material and Methods

Design

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, which combined qualitative and quantitative phases to investigate Iranian EFL learners' metaphorical conceptualizations of foreign language acquisition and to investigate the effects of conceptual metaphor instruction on their grammatical understanding of idiomatic expressions. The qualitative phase aimed at unearthing learners' latent cognitive and affective metaphorical schemas when they think about their language learning process. The quantitative phase, in the guise of a quasi-experimental study with pre-test and post-test, aimed at determining whether metaphor-based instruction leads to substantial improvements in idiomatic grammatical competence.

Participants

The qualitative phase employed 30 Iranian EFL learners (15 female and 15 male) selected from private language schools in Ardabil via purposive sampling. The age range was between 17 to 22 years old. Participants needed to be at the intermediate level based on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). The sample size was determined according to the saturation of data, where interviews were conducted in larger numbers until no new metaphorical themes emerged. The sampling method helped to have intensive and rich questioning of students' metaphorical conception and attain thematic redundancy.

In the quantitative phase, 384 students were randomly selected from a larger population of over 5,000 intermediate EFL students in private schools in Ardabil. The required sample size was approximated with the Cochran formula for estimating the sample size of a finite population under a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The 384 participants were randomly assigned to the two matched groups: the experimental group ($n = 192$, males = 94, females = 98) and the control group ($n = 192$, males = 93, females = 99). Due to the large number of participants, each group was divided into eight subgroups of 24 students based on institution scheduling and class size limitations.

In the experimental group, all subgroups received five weeks of idiom instruction grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory-based metaphor. In-person sessions were conducted by the same instructor trained to maintain teaching uniformity. The instructional materials developed by the researcher—visual, gestural, and spatial metaphors—were used uniformly for all the subgroups. A teacher manual and comprehensive lesson plan maintained pedagogical content and delivery standardized. Sessions were checked periodically to maintain fidelity to the instructional approach. The control group subgroups also received five weeks of idioms training but with a more traditional approach focusing on translation, dictionary meaning, and memorization. The training sessions were also conducted by the same instructor and used the same instructional materials without metaphor-based or multimodal content. Instructional time constraints (e.g., class duration number of sessions per week) were the same for both groups, and all classes were presented in similar classroom environments to minimize instruction bias. The two groups were matched based on OQPT scores (± 5 points), age range (18–25 years), and gender composition to control for demographic variables that could influence learning.

Materials and Instrumentation

Semi-Structured Interviews

To explore learners' metaphorical constructions of learning English, the researcher established a set of ten open-ended, semi-structured individual interview questions. The researcher took care in preparing these questions in such a way as to elicit metaphors capturing learners' internal processes, belief systems, affect, and conceptions about language acquisition. Questions such as "If you were to think about your learning of English as a journey, object, or activity, what would it be and why?" and "Do you have a metaphor or image that you think of when you consider learning English grammar?" were designed to ask respondents to charter their abstract learning processes into concrete, image-schemed spaces, in line with the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Other questions required examinees to think about specific subskills—speaking, writing, and grammar—by asking them to compare these skills to objects or activities (e.g., "What does English writing feel like to you? If you were to compare it to something, what would that be"? Other questions, for instance, "How would you describe your English teacher in terms of a metaphor?" and "Do you ever have a feeling of 'It's like climbing a mountain, racing against time, or solving a puzzle' when learning English?" were used to determine the way students perceive the

teacher's role and the emotional as well as cognitive barriers that they face. The final section of the interviews elicited reflection on change, motivation, and self-development through metaphor with questions like "Can you provide me with a metaphor that describes how your English learning has changed over time?" and "Is there a metaphor that best describes your purpose in learning English?" This long list of questions was designed not merely to draw out spontaneous metaphorical talk but also to investigate the deeper cognitive, affective, and motivational aspects of language learning.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group protocol was designed to initiate group reflection and metaphor generation through group discussion. Undefined questions such as "Can you come up with a metaphor or image that captures your experience of learning English?" and "If traveling to Englishland were a journey, where on the journey would you be now?" were used to prompt members to engage in the sharing of ideas and collaborative metaphorical construction. Other questions explored learners' affective and thinking processes, and they were invited to describe challenges, achievements, and perceptions of teacher support in metaphor (e.g., "How does your teacher support you in this process or journey? What metaphor would summarize their role?" and "How do you feel when you accomplish or fail at English learning—can you describe that feeling metaphorically?"). By including these visual, gestural, and narrative modality questions such as "Do you think using pictures, stories, or movements in class helps you understand better?" the focus group aimed to inquire about learners' receptivity to multimodal metaphor instruction. These questions collectively enabled the researcher to identify patterns, differences, and thematic metaphors that structure learners' understanding of English learning. This design allowed richness and depth of information along with flexibility and participant-driven explication required in conceptual metaphor analysis for qualitative research.

Instructional Materials for Intervention

For the experimental group, instructional material was intentionally designed by the researcher to include Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and multimodal pedagogy. Based on sources such as The Idiom Organizer (Wright et al., 2002; Barati, 2018) and more recent metaphor-focused SLA research (e.g., Xu et al., 2022), idioms and activities were selected to match intermediate learners' linguistic and cognitive capacity. Materials employed were visual devices (e.g., timelines, mind

maps), gesture-based teaching of grammar, narrative cues with metaphorical images, and image-schema schematizations (e.g., BRIDGE for coherence, CONTAINER for paragraph unity). These were tried out by TEFL experts and piloted with a small cohort of students ($n = 8$) before full implementation.

The control group, however, was taught the institute's normal curriculum that included regular grammar practice and compositions from commonly used books such as Top Notch 3 and Understanding and Using English Grammar by Betty Azar. These books offered rule-based instruction with practice materials having no metaphor-based or multimodal elements. The teaching was carried out through conventional teacher-centered modes, and the students were provided with no exposure to conceptual or multimodal metaphor structures during the intervention time.

Pre-test and Post-test

In order to assess the actual impact of conceptual metaphor instruction on the learners' grammatical, pre-tests and post-tests for the experimental and control groups were prepared.

The Grammatical Competence Test was specifically constructed to assess learners' control of grammar over metaphorically structured, idiomatically patterned expressions. It consisted of 25 items that mixed form, sense, and syntactic structure, from fill-in-the-blanks to sentence completion, and context-based multiple-choice items. The items were drawn from The Idiom Organizer (Wright et al., 2002), with a meticulous concern for both structural complexity and pedagogical usefulness. While the test only assessed vocabulary recall, it addressed learners' ability to use appropriately, synthesize, and employ idiomatic forms in grammatically correct sentences.

Researcher Made Questionnaire

A Likert-scale questionnaire developed by the researcher (31 items) was also administered to gather learners' self-report of instruction based on metaphor and its effect on their learning experience. The internal consistency of the measure was determined through a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.96. Content validity was ensured by getting three TEFL experts having expertise in instruction based on metaphors to review the items. For construct validity, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on a pilot sample ($n = 30$), which yielded a clear four-factor structure in line with instructional clarity, cognitive engagement, comprehension of metaphors,

and affective involvement. For criterion validity, learners' performance on the idiom post-test was compared with questionnaire scores, and moderate to strong positive correlations were obtained ($r = .61$, $p < .01$), which indicates convergent alignment. Though the questionnaire was specifically created for this study, the design was informed by previous research on language teaching using metaphors (e.g., Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008; Littlemore & Low, 2006), and this gave it a sound theoretical underpinning.

Data Collection

During the qualitative data collection phase, data were collected through verbal metaphor elicitation tasks and focus group interviews that were meant to uncover learners' metaphorical conceptualizations of language learning. Individual interviews lasted 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed word for word. 60–90 minutes of focus group interviews allowed participants to elaborate on prevailing metaphorical themes within a comfortable, non-intimidating environment facilitated by the researcher using icebreakers and informal conversation tactics.

In the quantitative phase, all the participants completed grammatical competence (idiomatic use). The pre-test was conducted under facilitating conditions, where explicit instructions were provided to reduce anxiety and enable maximum performance.

The five-week intervention comprised a variety of scaffolded, metaphor-enabled tasks that were coordinated with both grammar and writing education. In weeks one and two, idiomatic grammar practice had been paired with gestural and visual metaphors. Weeks two and three included metaphor mapping exercises, projecting idiomatic sense onto conceptual realms (e.g., TIME IS MONEY). Weeks three to five involved writing activities scaffolded visually on diagrams such as "writing as journey" and "paragraph as container" that were practiced in order to facilitate rhetorical organization. Grammar instruction during the intervention included gesture-supported grammar form reviewing. Reflective writing and creating group "metaphor posters" were incorporated within the final week to solidify learning. All sessions were delivered in 90-minute class intervals attended every other day, and a single lesson plan was developed to maintain consistency and cognitive engagement through metaphor. However, for the control group, the researcher used old methods of teaching in classes. After a five-week metaphor-based instruction treatment of the experimental group, both groups received a post-test using the same items as the pre-test but with questions shuffled to avoid recall bias. The post-test was administered under the

same conditions as the pre-test in order to enable valid comparisons of idiomatic grammatical and text gains.

Data Analysis

In line with the two research questions, two different methodological stances were adopted. For Research Question 1, which probed how Iranian EFL learners metaphorically conceptualize language learning, a qualitative approach was undertaken by virtue of metaphor elicitation tasks, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. These tools allowed for the thematic analysis of the learners' conceptual schemas in depth using MAXQDA software. In the first step, initial inductive coding was employed to find metaphorical expressions and group them by source domains (e.g., travel, construction, nature, emotion). These were subsequently consolidated into broad metaphorical themes with the help of CMT's model. Peer debriefing was conducted with two experienced TEFL peers who were familiar with qualitative metaphor research. Inter-coder agreement checks were carried out between the researcher and an additional trained coder with an applied linguistics background; differences were discussed and agreed upon. Member checking was completed with five interview group participants, who checked summaries of their responses and confirmed the accuracy and interpretation of their metaphorical language. For Research Question 2 of the study, which probed whether teaching conceptual metaphors improves grammatical understanding of idioms, a quasi-experimental design in a pre-test/post-test format was used. Data were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests (within-group changes) and independent-sample t-tests (between-group differences) in SPSS version 25. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were also computed to ascertain the practical significance of the intervention. This two-fold approach allowed for both detailed qualitative results and quantitatively rigorous statistical results in addressing the distinct aims of the study.

This study adhered to human subject research ethics. The Research Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Ardabil Branch, provided ethical clearance prior to data collection. All the participants were informed of the aims and methodology of the study, the voluntariness of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All the participants signed written informed consent forms, including consent to have interviews and focus group discussions taped and to publish anonymized quotes in reporting findings. All data were kept confidential, and

participant pseudonyms were employed to protect participant identity during analysis and publication.

Results

How do Iranian EFL learners metaphorically conceptualize foreign language learning?

The first research question was designed to determine how Iranian EFL learners metaphorically conceptualize foreign language learning. Based on qualitative analysis of metaphor elicitation tasks, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions from 30 intermediate learners, five prominent metaphorical themes emerged. These were identified through inductive coding and interpreted in the context of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Table 1 shows an overview of the frequency of each metaphorical theme, and Figure 1 demonstrates their distribution.

Table 1. Frequencies of Metaphorical Themes Used by Iranian EFL Learners

Metaphor Theme	Frequency (n=30)
Language Learning as a Journey	27
Grammar as a Puzzle or Machinery	24
Writing as Building or Crafting	22
Teacher as Guide or Gardener	25
Emotional Metaphors (Fear, Motivation, Confidence)	28

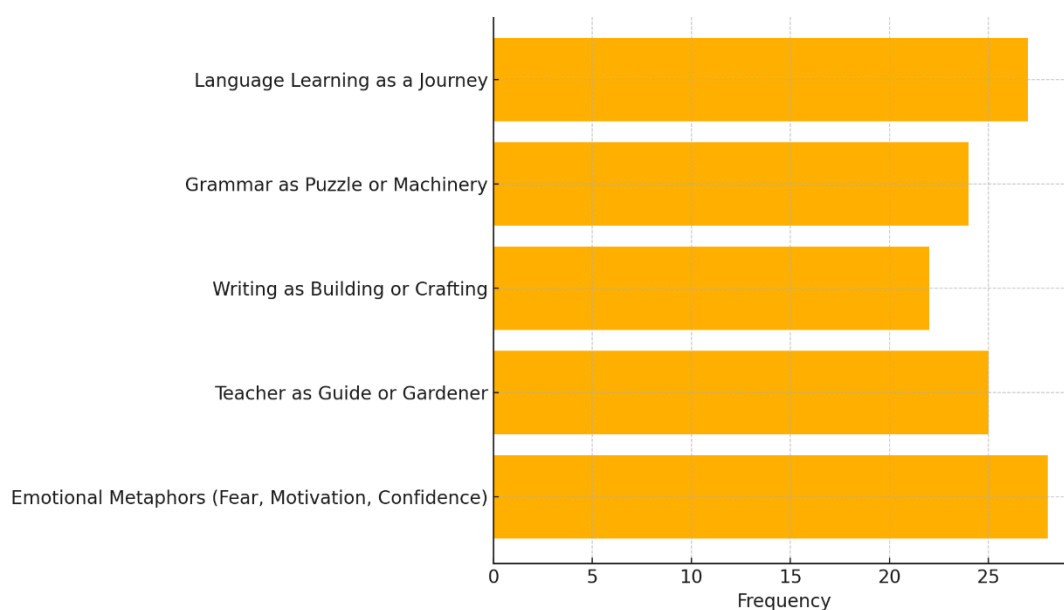


Fig. 1. Frequency of Metaphorical Themes Used by Iranian EFL Learners

Theme 1: Language Learning is a journey (n = 27)

This was the most frequently used theme, with 90% of the students seeing language acquisition as a process of movement or progress along space and time. The students described the experience as "climbing a mountain," "traveling along a long tunnel," or "riding on a bumpy road." These metaphors reflected their sense of forward progress, struggle, and requirement for guidance along the way. One student said:

"Learning English is going abroad for me. You need maps, directions, and sometimes the help of natives. It's exciting, but you also get lost".

The travel metaphor has learners seeing their acquisition as not only effortful and gradual but also uncertain and exploratory. The endpoint often symbolized fluency or confidence, and the path corresponded to curriculum, time, or practice.

Theme 2: Grammar as Machine or Puzzle (n = 24)

Eighty percent of the participants equated grammar with complex systems, comparing it to puzzles, machines, or formulas. This metaphor was frequently employed to convey fascination and frustration. Students cited grammar as "a car engine with lots of little pieces," "an enclosed box that requires a key," or "a math puzzle solvable by only a few." One respondent explained:

"Grammar is similar to fixing a machine. If something is not right in one place, the entire sentence does not work. It's logical but very sensitive".

This analogy suggests that students perceive grammar as logical and rule-based but sensitive to detail. It also suggests the need for strategic thinking, trying out, and possibly getting help (e.g., instruction).

Theme 3: Writing as Building or Crafting (n = 22)

While participants discussed diverse experiences of learning English, the present study focused primarily on writing and grammar due to their immediate relevance to textual and grammatical competence, which were the main constructs of the instructional intervention. Even though other skills, such as speaking and listening, were occasionally discussed, they were not investigated thematically because they were outside the given boundaries of the study. Writing was often described as a productive and imaginative act. Seventy-three percent of the students used metaphors such as "building a house," "weaving a fabric," or "creating a sculpture." These

metaphors presented writing as an organized, layered, and often aesthetic activity. One student explained:

"Writing is like constructing with blocks. I must establish a firm foundation—my topic sentence—and then I can add embellishments such as walls and decorations".

This theme reflected students' awareness of rhetorical organization, coherence, and logical flow, which were appropriate to their construction of textual competence and illustrated how metaphorical thinking served to aid their understanding of writing structure.

Theme 4: Teacher as Guide or Gardener (n = 25)

The majority of participants envisioned their teachers as leaders or caretakers, using metaphors such as "a guide in a jungle," "a lighthouse," or "a gardener who causes ideas to bloom." This metaphor indicates that students think of teachers as much greater than information providers but as intellectual and emotional facilitators. One student described:

"Our teacher is a gardener. He sows seeds in our heads and patiently waits for us to grow up. He sometimes showers us with light, water".

These metaphors described the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of learning. They also symbolized learners' hopes of care, support, and patience from their teachers.

Theme 5: Emotional Metaphors – Fear, Motivation, and Confidence (n = 28)

Nearly all participants (93.3%) used emotionally charged metaphors to represent their internal states while learning English. Metaphors such as "walking through fog," "meeting a monster," "flying like a bird," or "carrying a heavy bag" represented learners' states of anxiety and confusion against optimism and motivation. A particularly vivid declaration was:

"Speaking English is like walking on stage in front of an enormous group. I'm afraid, but I know I must perform".

These metaphors uncovered the energetic affective dimension of language learning and the ways students instantiated their success and frustration in rich, somatic ways. In particular, positive affective metaphors (e.g., "I feel like flying when I know") consistently appeared after mention of encouraging instructors, effective classroom procedures, or moments of clarity, linking metaphorical construction with felt experience and reported progress.

These metaphorical themes reflect that Iranian EFL learners conceptualize learning language in embodied, affective, and relational ways. The metaphors are not at all arbitrary linguistic selections

but reflect learners' internal schemata, expectations, and challenges. The prevalence of emotional metaphors suggests that psychological mechanisms like confidence, motivation, and anxiety are central to learners' experiences. Journey and guide metaphors reflect that learner need to be given structure, direction, and guidance. Building and puzzle metaphors reflect their mental labor with writing and grammar.

Finally, these results uphold the validity of metaphor analysis in second language acquisition. The learners' metaphorical frames reveal what conceptualizations learners have about learning processes and can be called upon to guide metaphor-based pedagogy, especially in areas such as grammar and writing, where abstractness can hinder understanding.

Does the use of conceptual metaphors enhance Iranian EFL learners' grammatical understanding of idioms?

To investigate this query, the experimental group ($n = 192$) and the control group ($n = 192$) were administered pre-and post-tests of idiomatic grammatical knowledge. The control group was provided with conventional instruction, while the experimental group received metaphor-based instruction designed on the basis of Conceptual Metaphor Theory formulations (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to contrast changes in performance between and within groups.

Control Group Performance

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for both conditions. The control group's mean pre-test score was 13.70 ($SD = 2.59$), increasing to 14.06 ($SD = 2.91$) following instruction. The 0.36-point increase, although suggesting a small improvement, is modest.

Table 2. Descriptive and Paired Samples Analysis for Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Test	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)	Correlation
Control	Pre-test	192	13.70	2.59						
	Post-test	192	14.06	2.91	-0.36	-3.45	187	.001	~0.25 (small)	R=.870
Experimental	Pre-test	192	13.58	2.87						
	Post-test	192	18.43	3.38	-4.85	-33.40	195	.000	~1.5 (very large)	R=.800

The control group correlation was $r = 0.870$ ($p = .000$), indicating a high and significant relationship between pre- and post-test scores. This shows that learners' post-test performance was highly predicted by their pre-test scores, indicating little change in grammatical knowledge during the instructional period. Pre- and post-test score correlation was calculated to test the predictive relationship and stability of performance over time by each group. For the control group, the high correlation ($r = .870$) suggests that the relative standings of participants (i.e., low or high) were scarcely altered during the instructional period. This stability implies that normal instruction was not capable of significantly altering learners' grammatical proficiency, substantiating minimal gain in mean scores.

A paired-sample t-test for the control group revealed a statistically significant difference between pre-and post-test scores, $t(187) = -3.45$, $p = .001$. However, the actual mean gain was minimal (0.36), and the 95% confidence interval ($-0.57, -0.15$) further indicates that this change, while statistically reliable, was small in practical terms. This interpretation is supported by the small effect size (Cohen's $d \approx 0.25$), suggesting that traditional instruction produced limited improvement in learners' idiomatic grammatical competence.

Experimental Group Performance

The experimental group, however, showed a tremendous improvement. The pre-test mean score was 13.58 ($SD = 2.87$), and the post-test mean score improved by a significant margin to 18.43 ($SD = 3.38$)—an improvement of approximately 4.85 points. The standard errors for the pre-test and post-test means were small, reflecting the precision of the scores due to the large sample size. A strong correlation was observed between pre-and post-test scores ($r = .800$, $p < .001$), indicating that learners' relative performance remained consistent. However, the substantial mean gain (4.85 points) across the group suggests that the metaphor-based instruction was broadly effective and led to improvements at varying proficiency levels.

A paired samples t-test confirmed that the pre- and post-test score difference within the experimental group was very statistically significant, $t(195) = -33.40$, $p = .000$. The mean difference of -4.85 , with a 95% confidence interval of -5.14 to -4.57 , indicates a large and practically significant effect. The difference standard deviation was 2.03, with a standard error of 0.14528, further indicating the robustness of the finding.

Between-Group Comparisons

As you can see in Table 3, before the intervention, an independent samples t-test revealed no pre-test difference in the control and treatment groups to be significant, $t(382) = -0.540$, $p = .589$. The mean difference was 0.15 (not significant), which implied that both groups began the study on a similar baseline.

After the instructional phase, though, the control group was outperformed significantly by the experimental group. The experimental group had a mean post-test score of 18.49 (SD = 3.35) compared to the control group's 14.09 (SD = 2.94). The independent samples t-test revealed the difference to be highly significant, $t(382) = 13.67$, $p = .000$, having a mean difference of 4.40 points and a 95% confidence interval of 3.76 to 5.03.

Table 3. Independent Samples t-Test Results Comparing Control and Experimental Groups

Test	Group Comparison	N (each)	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Pre-Test	Exp vs. Ctrl	192 vs. 192	–0.15	–0.54	382	.589	–0.70 to 0.40
Post -Test	Exp vs. Ctrl	192 vs. 192	4.40	13.67	382	.000	3.76 to 5.03

The result verifies that metaphor-based instruction exerts an intense influence on the improvement of learners' idiomatic grammatical competence. While the control group recorded minimal or no genuine gain, presumably due to repetition or familiarization, performance in the experimental group logged a genuine gain. This tells us that the use of conceptual metaphors allowed learners to internalize idiomatic expressions more effectively by linking them with realistic, bodily source domains. Teaching methods such as visual metaphor mapping, gesture-based modeling, and narrative metaphors rendered abstract idiomatic structures more learnable and recallable.

The findings not only support the cognitive underpinnings of metaphor in second language acquisition (SLA) but also highlight its strong pedagogical value. Instruction grounded in conceptual metaphors enabled learners to move beyond surface-level memorization toward deeper, conceptually grounded understanding. This shift was reflected in substantial, measurable gains in learners' grammatical performance. Figure 2 shows these differences in the pre-test and post-test of both the control and experimental group.

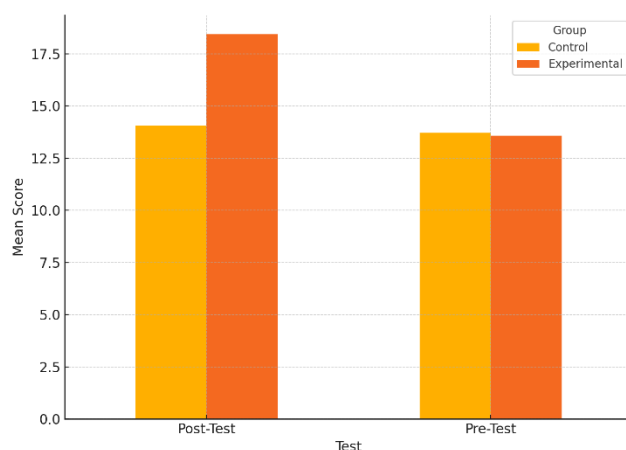


Fig 2. Comparison of Pre- and Post-Test Mean Scores for Control and Experimental Groups

Discussion

The results of this study provide strong evidence that students reflect on language learning and teaching in the form of rich and embodied metaphors. These metaphors are not merely creative expressions but deeply significant descriptions of their internal lives, pedagogical aspirations, and affective experiences. Across both qualitative and quantitative phases, it became clear that conceptual metaphors shape not only how participants talk about language learning but also how they engage with it cognitively and emotionally. In addition, the measurable improvements in grammar and writing capacity among the experimental group demonstrate that metaphor-based instruction, and more specifically that which is multimodal, carries quantifiable pedagogical benefits.

The findings of the study provide a dynamic entry into how Iranian EFL students metaphorically conceptualize learning English. As an application of the tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Kövecses, 2020), the students did not merely use metaphors as verbal adornments; rather, their metaphorical speech was cognitive models that helped in structuring and giving meaning to their complex learning experiences. The metaphorical ideas illustrate how students comprehend their progress, have problems with grammar systems, express affective states, and comprehend their roles in relation to instructors and assignments.

The dominant master metaphor—learning language is a journey—mirrors a vast body of metaphor research (Xu et al., 2022; Anderson, 2018). It emphasizes the time-consuming, step-by-step, and

tiresome nature of language learning. English learners' common appeal to travel metaphors such as "climbing a mountain" or "crossing a chasm" indicates their cognitive thinking of English learning as a non-linear, uncontrollable activity requiring endurance and direction. These metaphors underpin Johnson's (2013) and Alibali and Nathan's (2018) contention that learning, especially in foreign language contexts, is conceived of in terms of spatial and movement experience through sensorimotor embodiment. Not merely is the travel metaphor structural but affective too: learners populate it with emotional meaning, feeling fear of failure, hope of success, and motivation to persist.

Close to the journey metaphor are the sub-metaphors of "progress," "obstacles," and "milestones," which capture learners' sense of challenge and change across time. Metaphorical descriptions provide us a glimpse into learners' metacognitive awareness and goal-orientation—familiar results to Esfandiari et al. (2022), who demonstrated that writing instruction led by metaphor increased learners' motivational stances by allowing them to see learning as incremental empowerment. Beyond that, repeated use by students of "barriers," "detours," and "turning points" indicates a refined awareness of language learning's affective highs and lows—emotions that are poorly researched in current SLA research.

The "grammar as a puzzle or machine" metaphor affirmed students' perception of grammatical rules as complex, fitting-together sets that must be solved. Contrary to the traditional notion of grammar as a set of prescriptive rules, learners referred to grammar as dynamic, functional, and at times intimidating—one akin to a "Rubik's Cube," a "locked engine," or a "fragile machine." These metaphors are in accord with Afifi (2021) and Zhang (2018), who reported that learners perceive grammar as both stimulating to the intellect and cognitively demanding. Furthermore, the maze and mechanical metaphors in this research symbolize frustration and overwhelm, as posited by Saneie et al. (2020). The dual depiction of grammar as solvable and anxiety-inducing is helpful for instructional design implications, suggesting that there is a need for pedagogical scaffolding to reduce the popularity of grammar but also to honor the complexity perceived.

The third theme—writing as building or composing—captured students' conception of English writing as an imaginative, strategic, and recursive process. Metaphors such as "building a house," "painting a picture," or "cooking a dish" suggest a shift in students' conceptualization from viewing writing as formulaic to viewing writing as an expressive and personally meaningful act. These

metaphors are supported by studies by Vadipoor et al. (2023) and Rahimi and Fathi (2022), which found that writing instruction grounded in metaphors increased students' engagement and metacognitive regulation. Students' construction-based metaphors also show their emphasis on writing processes like planning, organization, and revision, supporting Chea and Shumow's (2014) argument that writing efficacy increases when students perceive writing as an organized but flexible process.

The guide, coach, or gardener theme highlighted the socio-emotional nature of the learning process. Students envisioned teachers as having changed from being knowledge-only deliverers. They were introduced as facilitators, nurturers, and inspirers. This is consistent with research carried out by Ahmad and Abd Samad (2018) and Shaw and Andrei (2020), which underscores how students' metaphors relating to teachers are inclined to reflect implicit assumptions about pedagogy, identity, and social interaction. The gardener metaphor, in particular, suggested a vision of constant caring and emotional support. This view supports Farrell's (2018) "emotionally intelligent teaching" theory and affective scaffolding's role during second language acquisition.

Finally, the presence of emotional metaphors—specifically those involving fear, courage, self-assurance, and motivation—emphasizes affect's prime role in structuring learners' metaphorical worldview. These metaphors—from "standing on a stage," "drowning in words," to "flying freely"—encapsulate both vulnerability and empowerment that exist with language use. Sabti et al. (2019) and Kabisigting et al. (2020) note that learners are more likely to manifest language anxiety, writing apprehension, and fear of speaking using exposure and performance metaphors. Conversely, metaphors of racing, cycling, or floating prompted perseverance, progress, and enjoyment. These metaphors are not merely feelings expressed but construct a narrative of emotional engagement with the learning process that is informed and informs instructional experience.

Overall, the metaphors reported by Iranian EFL learners reflect a highly personalized and cognitively sophisticated conception of language learning. Learners are not mere recipients of instruction but active meaning-builders who engage in conversation with language in dynamic, metaphorically structured schemas. These findings support the overall thesis of Evans (2019) and Steen (2023) that metaphors are not mere linguistic ornaments but robust cognitive models that structure perception, control behavior, and mediate the effects of instruction. The diversity and

richness in students' metaphors yield pedagogically actionable knowledge. Teachers can use these metaphorical frameworks as diagnostic tools to reveal students' beliefs and emotional dispositions and as scaffolds to shape instruction that addresses learners' lived realities.

These findings suggest that greater sensitivity to learners' metaphorical framing is likely to enhance instructional empathy, construct learner identity, and facilitate more individualized and motivationally congruent learning environments. Metaphor-awareness training for learners and teachers alike can then become a core aspect of reflective practice and learner-centered instruction in the context of EFL.

Research Question 2 explored whether conceptual metaphors can enhance Iranian EFL learners' grammatical awareness of idioms. Results clearly indicate that metaphor-based instruction had a significant and statistically significant influence on learners' comprehension of idioms and grammatical processing. This was evidenced through a contrastive study between two matched groups: one instructed with instruction enriched with metaphor, and the other instructed with traditional methods.

The findings indicate that traditional instruction had minimal impact on learners' development of idiomatic grammatical competence. As much as the control group learners did slightly better, their post-test scores were extremely correlated with their pre-test levels, reflecting that instruction did not make a significant difference in terms of their conceptual knowledge or application of idioms. In contrast, the experimental group learners significantly improved performance. The metaphor instruction appeared to support students at various levels of proficiency, supporting the hypothesis that metaphor instruction supports inclusive and more profound learning. Lower- and higher-achieving students both enjoyed the benefits of using this kind of instruction when dealing with idiomatic grammar in more meaningful and embodied ways. Furthermore, both groups started at equivalent baseline points, which further supports the finding that the improvement observed in the experimental group was a result directly attributable to the metaphor-instruction intervention. Collectively, these discoveries empirically validate the pedagogical worth of utilizing Conceptual Metaphor Theory in instructing grammar and composition, and there is strong evidence supporting its use as a novel learning practice for implementation in EFL contexts.

These findings are strongly congruent with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, 2020), according to which abstract thinking—e.g., understanding grammatical structures or

idiomatic expressions—is founded on metaphorical thinking. Idioms, being intrinsically figurative, are supported by metaphorical instruction to make their meanings more transparent and accessible their meanings. For instance, illustrating an idiom like "spill the beans" using a concrete or bodily metaphor of a container overflowing with contents allows learners to access literal and metaphorical senses, ensuring retention and understanding. This is evidenced by Boers and Lindstromberg (2008), whose research demonstrated that awareness of the metaphoric sense enhances semantic decoding and memorability of idioms.

Further, the paper benefits from Littlemore and Low's (2006) and Pérez-Sobrino et al.'s (2019) breakthrough to emphasize the need to view idioms as motivated conceptual mappings rather than opaque expressions. Learners who have been taught metaphorical thinking are likely to recognize idioms as structured and meaningful rather than random, thereby boosting their semantic transparency and ease of processing.

The reliability of the findings is confirmed by the low standard error of the mean (SEM) for both groups (0.20-0.24) and the tight confidence intervals, which emphasize the stability of the results. Instead of regarding idioms as memorization-heavy or semantically opaque, students likely began to view them as based on shared, bodily human experience—a feature of metaphorical thinking. Pedagogically, these findings are both insightful and encouraging. Firstly, they show that conceptual metaphor-informed instruction provides learners with cognitive scaffolding that narrows the gap between disembodied grammar and situated experience. Secondly, teaching in such a manner enhances affective investment and reduces anxiety since learners interact with idiomatic expressions in memorable, contextual, and positive contexts. This is supported by affective learning research such as Sodeiri and Rashidi (2023) and Dörnyei and Ryan (2015), who are of the opinion that semantically based meaningful instruction in metaphor enhances learner motivation and emotional involvement.

Third, and most importantly, metaphor-based teaching is demonstrably effective for learners across proficiency levels, as even low-performing pupils make dramatic improvements from its schema-activating and analogy-based approach. In projecting difficult linguistic input onto prior bodily and sensory know-how, metaphorical teaching encourages deeper processing, reduced cognitive load, and more accurate use of idiomatic language.

These findings corroborate earlier claims in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008) and embodied cognition (Shapiro & Stolz, 2019) that metaphor is both a cognitive and emotional scaffold for learning. The "language learning as a journey" or "grammar as a puzzle" metaphors reported by learners here are the same metaphors found in earlier research (Oxford et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2022). Specifically, this study expands on previous research by showing how multimodal metaphors—presented visually, spatially, and gesturally—can be leveraged to enhance learning gains in idiomatic grammar and rhetorical writing. The observed gain is aligned with empirical findings by Pan (2019) and Song and Reynolds (2023), who emphasized the application of metaphor in enhancing idiomatic comprehension .

In summary, the findings offer powerful evidence that teaching conceptual metaphor is not only a pedagogical method but a key cognitive strategy that enables students to make sense of abstract grammatical entities and figurative language. Through conceptual metaphor, learners bridge the language-lived experience divide so they have better control, confidence, and mastery of English idiomatic grammar. These outcomes strongly make a case for the introduction of metaphorical thought into EFL research and for ongoing research into the application of metaphor as a catalyst for revitalizing and reformulating the teaching of language and learner identity. All studies have not uniformly established the benefits of instructional metaphor, for that matter. For example, Littlemore (2006) was worried about cognitive overload when he said that learners might end up in trouble when many metaphoric domains are met simultaneously. Kövecses (2015) warned against cross-cultural mismatches—that student from other cultures might misunderstand or not identify as expected with English metaphors with unheard-of source domains. In others (e.g., Chen, 2019), instruction in metaphors had limited gains with lower-proficiency learners, particularly where instruction was less scaffolded or contextually situated. Implications are that instruction in conceptual metaphors will be extremely effective but that this is contingent on instructional design, learner preparation, and cultural alignment. These factors must be investigated systematically in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study confirms that conceptual metaphors play a dual role—as both cognitive models and instructional tools—that significantly shape Iranian EFL learners' understanding of idiomatic grammar and language learning experiences. Despite its contributions,

this study is not without limitations. For one, the research was limited to instructors and EFL students at private institutions in Ardabil, Iran. So, the findings may not be applicable in other cultural or institutional contexts. For another, the research was aimed at intermediate-level students mostly, so the question of how beginner or advanced students would respond to metaphor-based instruction is still open. Thirdly, while the multimodal intervention was well designed, it was taught for only five weeks; an extended period of teaching may yield deeper or more sustained improvements. Lastly, while metaphor elicitation was triangulated with focus groups and interviews, all data were grounded in self-reported perceptions, which are susceptible to social desirability bias.

From a practical perspective, the research highlights the value of promoting metaphorical thinking and multimodal activity in EFL classes. Instructors can integrate visual metaphors, gestural explanations, and narrative analogies to help students engage more deeply with intricate grammatical and rhetorical forms. Teacher education programs might also include metaphor awareness exercises that encourage teachers to reflect on how their conceptual metaphors shape instructional choices. Additionally, curriculum developers can draw on universally shared metaphors to create culturally relevant and cognitively engaging learning materials.

Future research on the topic may expand upon these findings, including diverse learning populations with regard to age, proficiency levels, or geographical locations. It would also be worth exploring whether students' metaphorical schemas change through time and if long-term metaphor-based teaching results in retention or even transfer in the long run. Further experimental studies could study whether specific modalities (such as visual vs. gestural) of metaphor-based teaching are more beneficial than others. Finally, researchers may examine metaphor use across different language skills, such as listening and speaking, to paint a more comprehensive picture of metaphor's pedagogical potential.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Funding

This study did not receive any financial support from governmental, private, or nonprofit organizations.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

References

- Abdulaal, M. A. A. D., Abuslema, N. F. M. A., Hal, A. Z. M., Amer, A. A., & Altohami, W. (2023). A multimodal investigation of EFL upper-intermediate learners' conceptual metaphors of language learning with some psychological implications. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01546-9>
- Adami, E. (2023). A social semiotic multimodal approach to translation. In *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Theory and Concepts* (pp. 369-388). Routledge.
- Afifi, N. (2021). Exploring the use of grammatical metaphor in Indonesian EFL learners' academic writing. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(3), 719-731. <http://repository.iainkediri.ac.id/id/eprint/794>
- Ahmad, N. K., & Abd Samad, A. (2018). Metaphors as proxies for identity: A case study of a teaching English to young learners (TEYL) teacher. *3L, Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 24(4).
- Alibali, M. W., & Nathan, M. J. (2018). Embodied cognition in learning and teaching: Action, observation, and imagination. In *International Handbook of the Learning Sciences* (pp. 75-85). Routledge.

- Amerian, M. (2023). ESP for Media: Wonderland of Metaphors Uncovers the Students' Perceived 'Needs'. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, 11(1), 169-192. <https://doi.org/10.30479/jmrels.2023.18583.2191>
- Amin, T. G. (2018). Conceptual metaphor and the study of conceptual change: Research synthesis and future directions. *Conceptual metaphor and embodied cognition in science learning*, 234-260.
- Anderson, R. C. (2018). Creative engagement: Embodied metaphor, the affective brain, and meaningful learning. *Mind, brain, and education*, 12(2), 72-81. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mbe.12176>
- Barati, M. (2018). Evaluation of conceptual metaphor theory. *Journal of Linguistics and Rhetorical Studies*, 8(16). https://rhetorical.semnan.ac.ir/article_2999.html?lang=en
- Boers, F. (2018). Intentional versus incidental learning. *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching*, 1-6.
- Boers, F., & Lindstromberg, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Cognitive linguistic approaches to teaching vocabulary and phraseology* (p. 355). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Chea, S., & Shumow, L. (2014). The relationships among writing self-efficacy, writing goal orientation, and writing achievement. *Language Education in Asia*, 5(2), 253-269. https://doi.org/10.5746/LEiA/14/V5/I2/A07/Chea_Shumow
- Chen, Y. C. (2019). Teaching figurative language to EFL learners: an evaluation of metaphoric mapping instruction. *The language learning journal*, 47(1), 49-63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2016.1185798>
- Dornyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. Routledge.
- Esfandiari, R. , Vadipour, G. and Shabani, M. B. (2022). Conceptual Metaphor as a Cognitive Solution to English Writing Problems: The effect of instruction on Writing Attitude and Self-efficacy of EFL Learners. *Journal of Foreign Language Research*, 12(3), 195-213. doi: 10.22059/jflr.2022.338927.934
- Evans, V., & Green, M. (2018). *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315864327>
- Fallah, R., Pourhaji, M., & Mehdizadeh, M. (2024). Metaphor Awareness in Action: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to Enhancing Comprehension and Production of Phrasal Verbs in EFL

- Learners. *Applied Research on English Language*, 13(3), 1-18. 10.22108/are.2024.140569.2232
- Farjami, H. (2012). EFL learners' metaphors and mental imagery related to grammar learning. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL)*, 15(1), 19-41. Retrieved from <https://ijal.khu.ac.ir/article-1-77-en.pdf>
- Farjami, H. (2012). EFL students' images and metaphors of grammar learning. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL)*, 15(1), 19-41. <https://ijal.khu.ac.ir/article-1-77-en.pdf>
- Forceville, C. (2017). Visual and multimodal metaphor in advertising: Cultural perspectives. *Styles of communication*, 9(2).
- Golfam, A., & Nahavandi, M. (2021). Using multimodal conceptual metaphors in EFL Classroom to enhance listening and speaking skills. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 13(28), 113-126. <https://doi.org/10.22034/elt.2021.47939.2439>
- Johnson, M. (2013). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2020). An extended view of conceptual metaphor theory. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, 18(1), 112-130. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/rcl.00053.kov>
- Lakoff and Johnson (2008),
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2020). Conceptual metaphor in everyday language. In *Shaping entrepreneurship research* (pp. 475-504). Routledge.
- Littlemore, J., & Low, G. (2006). Metaphoric competence, second language learning, and communicative language ability. *Applied linguistics*, 27(2), 268-294.
- Oxford, R. L., Griffiths, C., Longhini, A., Cohen, A. D., Macaro, E., & Harris, V. (2014). Experts' personal metaphors and similes about language learning strategies. *System*, 43(1), 11-29.
- Pan, M. X. (2019). The effectiveness of the Conceptual Metaphor Approach to English idiom acquisition by young Chinese learners. *Metaphor and the Social World*, 9(1), 59-82. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/msw.17024.pan>
- Pérez-Sobrino, P., Littlemore, J., & Houghton, D. (2019). The role of figurative complexity in the comprehension and appreciation of advertisements. *Applied Linguistics*, 40(6), 957-991. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amy039>

- Piquer-Píriz, A. M. (2020). Figurative language and young L2 learners. *Metaphor in foreign language instruction*, 57-77. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110630367>
- Rahimi, M., & Fathi, J. (2022). Exploring the impact of wiki-mediated collaborative writing on EFL students' writing performance, writing self-regulation, and writing self-efficacy: a mixed methods study. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 35(9), 2627-2674. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1888753>
- Saneie Moghadam, M., & Ghafar Samar, R. (2020). Metaphor in second language academic writing. *Language awareness*, 29(3-4), 255-271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2020.1786577>
- Shapiro, L., & Stolz, S. A. (2019). Embodied cognition and its significance for education. *Theory and Research in Education*, 17(1), 19-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878518822149>
- Shaw, D., & Andrei, E. (2020). Pre-service teachers' metaphors of learning and teaching English as a second language. *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1515/mlt-2018-0007>
- Sodeiri, Z., & Rashidi, N. (2023). Teaching English phrasal verbs to teenager EFL learners of elementary level through conceptual metaphors. *Eurasian Journal of Language Teaching & Linguistic Studies (EAJLTLS)*, 3(1).
- Song, T., & Reynolds, B. L. (2023). Breaking Through Opacity and Idiomaticity: Teaching English Phrasal Verbs Using Conceptual Metaphors.
- Vadipoor, G., Esfandiari, R., & Shabani, M. B. (2023). The Effect of Conceptual Metaphor on Writing Creativity and Metacognitive Writing Awareness. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 12(1), 33-66. (DOI): 10.22054/ilt.2023.66211.678
- Wright, J., Hill, J., & Lewis, M. (2002). *Idioms Organiser: Organised by metaphor, topic and keyword*. Thomson.
- Xu, L., Naserpour, A., Rezai, A., Namaziandost, E., & Azizi, Z. (2022). Exploring EFL learners' metaphorical conceptions of language learning: a multimodal analysis. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 51(2), 323-339. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-022-09842-2>
- Zhang, Y. (2018). Examining the application of grammatical metaphors in academic writing. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 8(2), 108-114.

Appendix A

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The purpose of this questionnaire is to understand better how English language learners like you perceive language learning and how different teaching methods, especially the use of metaphors, may influence your grammar and writing skills. There are 31 statements in this questionnaire. Please read each one carefully and indicate how much you agree or disagree using the following scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

There are no right or wrong answers—what matters is your honest opinion based on your own learning experiences. Your responses will remain completely confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Thank you again for your valuable contribution.

Theme	No.	Item				
			Completely Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)
						Completely Disagree (1)
Language Learning as a Journey	1	I see learning English as a personal journey filled with new experiences.				
	2	Mastering English feels like reaching different milestones in a long trip.				
	3	I believe persistence is key in the journey of learning English.				
Grammar as Puzzle or Machinery	4	I enjoy figuring out grammar rules like solving a puzzle.				
	5	English grammar works like machinery—every rule has its function.				
	6	Understanding grammar feels like assembling pieces of a system.				
Writing in English as Building or Crafting	7	Writing in English feels like constructing a building with ideas.				
	8	I treat each sentence like a brick in the structure of my writing.				
	9	I carefully craft my English writing like an artist shaping their work.				
English Teacher as Guide or Gardener	10	My teacher guides me like a navigator in the language-learning process.				
	11	I see my teacher as someone who helps me grow like a gardener.				
	12	A good teacher nurtures students just like plants in a garden.				
Emotional Metaphors (Fear, Motivation, Confidence)	13	Learning English sometimes feels like a battle with fear and doubt.				
	14	When I succeed in English, I feel proud and confident.				
	15	Motivation helps me overcome emotional struggles in learning English.				
	16	English classes often trigger emotions like anxiety or excitement.				
Emotional Factors	17	My mood affects how well I can focus on learning English.				

	18	I feel emotionally connected to my progress in English.
	19	Positive emotions help me learn English better.
Perceived Teacher Role and Support	20	My teacher supports me when I feel stuck in learning.
	21	I trust my teacher's methods and encouragement.
	22	Feedback from my teacher boosts my motivation to learn.
Learning Environment and Cultural Context	23	The classroom environment makes a big difference in how I learn English.
	24	Cultural differences sometimes make English learning more challenging.
	25	I learn English better when the examples relate to my real life.
Multimodal and Metaphor-Based Instruction	26	I learn grammar better through visuals like pictures or videos.
	27	Metaphors help me understand abstract grammar rules.
	28	Multimodal instruction (e.g., images, and gestures) makes English lessons more interesting.
Personal Learning History	29	My past experiences with English affect how I learn today.
	30	I often compare new lessons with what I learned in the past.
	31	I bring my previous knowledge to each new English topic I study.

Appendix B

Grammatical Competence Test Items (25 items)

Part A: Fill-in-the-Blank (10 items)

Complete the sentences with the correct idiomatic expression from the list below. Use **one idiom per sentence**. You may need to change the form slightly.

Word Bank: break the ice / feel under the weather / bite the bullet / pull someone's leg / get cold feet / hit the nail on the head / spill the beans / take it with a grain of salt / burn the midnight oil / cost an arm and a leg

1. It was our first meeting, so I told a joke to _____.
2. I didn't go to class today because I _____.
3. I know the exam is difficult, but you just have to _____ and try your best.
4. Don't take him seriously—he's just trying to _____.
5. Right before the performance, Sarah _____ and didn't want to go on stage.
6. That comment you made really _____. It was exactly right.
7. We were planning a surprise party, but John _____, and now everyone knows.
8. I'd _____ what he said; he tends to exaggerate.
9. I have a big deadline, so I'll have to _____ tonight.
10. That designer bag must have _____!

Part B: Sentence Completion (5 items)

Choose the **best idiom** to complete each sentence meaningfully.

11. After weeks of ignoring the problem, the manager finally decided to _____.
a) jump the gun
b) face the music
c) cry over spilled milk
d) go the extra mile
12. Jane and Mike are like oil and water. They just don't _____.
a) see eye to eye
b) bend over backwards

c) let the cat out of the bag

d) turn over a new leaf

13. I was really nervous before the interview, but his friendly smile helped me _____.

a) keep my chin up

b) feel in the same boat

c) break the ice

d) hit the sack

14. When you told your story about the accident, I could tell you were just _____.

a) making ends meet

b) pulling my leg

c) hitting the books

d) on the same page

15. Their team always manages to _____ when it matters most.

a) get out of hand

b) rise to the occasion

c) bite the bullet

d) put all eggs in one basket

Part C: Multiple Choice (10 items)

Choose the **correct meaning** of the underlined idiom in each sentence.

16. She was *feeling under the weather*, so she stayed home.

a) She had a lot of work

b) She was feeling sad

c) She was not feeling well

d) It was raining outside

17. He always *bends over backwards* to help his friends.

a) Complains about others

b) Avoids helping people

c) Makes a big effort

d) Changes his mind quickly

18. You should *sleep on it* before making a final decision.

a) Delay your decision until you've rested

b) Make a fast choice

c) Ask someone else to decide

d) Dream about it

19. They're *in hot water* after breaking the rules.

a) Doing something exciting

b) Facing trouble

c) Going swimming

d) Being promoted

20. When she finally *got the ball rolling*, everything became easier.

a) Started the process

b) Played a sport

c) Rolled downhill

d) Failed the task

21. Don't *cry over spilled milk*.

- a) Don't drink too much
 - b) Don't waste food
 - c) Don't worry about things you can't change
 - d) Don't talk when eating
22. That dress *costs an arm and a leg*!
- a) It's very expensive
 - b) It's old-fashioned
 - c) It's hard to wear
 - d) It's only one color
23. She was *walking on air* after getting the scholarship.
- a) Worried
 - b) Very tired
 - c) Extremely happy
 - d) Confused
24. The joke *went over his head*.
- a) He didn't understand it
 - b) It made him laugh a lot
 - c) It was about his hair
 - d) He was offended
25. I told him the truth and finally *got it off my chest*.
- a) I felt worse afterward
 - b) I made a mistake
 - c) I shared something I'd been hiding
 - d) I was angry